3:Davenport 2-5 (1960-1969)1962
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438 could purvey her services as a prostitute, sell her outright or even kill her
[595] without fear of retaliation. None of these
[548] things could be done with wives. But since the purchase price of a concubine was 10 times higher than a bride price, selling a girl into concubinage had its attractions for many Reef Island families. The British Government has forbidden the practice, but Reef Island
[177] women still go south as wives. Their
[583] bride prices are the main source of cur-
[554] rency for their home islands. An imported wife brings extra prestige to a Santa Cruz man, and bride prices for Reef women run about twice as high as they do for domestic wives.

The Duff Islanders get their feather currency not by selling women but by building large sailing canoes that carry on interisland traffic in passengers and cargo. The men of the Duffs do not en-
[437] gage in that traffic themselves; they sell
[505] the canoes for feather currency to the people of a few of the western Reef Islands, who in turn specialize in voyaging and trading throughout the islands. These mariners sail even to the southern islands of Utupua and Vanikoro in search of trade. The two islands are outside the feather-currency area, but their people until recently depended on the
[436] canoes to bring them the shell disks and lengths of woven cloth they used as currency. For these precious items they
[437] traded, at fixed rates, packets of red honey eater feathers, and these were resold on Santa Cruz to the makers of feather currency. In this manner the two different money systems became interlocked and interdependent, and the economies of north and south remain so today, even though there is no longer any traffic in currency materials.

177 Since the end of World War II the
436 Santa Cruz monetary system has come under pressure from the world outside. More and more Australian money has flowed into the islands; it circulates along with the feather currency and is completely interchangeable with it. Today the rate of exchange is roughly one shilling for a piece of feather money of minimum value. This makes the par value of a No. 1 piece 512 shillings, or about 25 Australian pounds. Figured in
[464] terms of labor (at the prevailing net wage rate for unskilled labor in the central Solomons, where most Santa Cruz men work at some point in their lives), the value of a new piece of currency is roughly comparable: about 20 to 24 pounds.

458 Plantation wages have nearly trebled
177 since 1945. The great increase in the

higher the value of a piece of currency, the fewer there are; thus the rarity value increases with the value as determined by its condition. Translated in terms of our own money, it would be as if a ten-dollar bill was worth more than ten one-dollar bills because there are fewer of them in circulation. Unlike our money again, feather currency has no numerical units of value which permit easy and exact equivalencies to be made. Rather, the value of this exotic currency is not unlike that of precious gems, were they to be used as a medium of exchange. Each stone would be unique as to quality and size, and value could only be determined by recognized criteria of excellence plus the condition of the market.

Currency flows outward from its source throughout Santa Cruz Island and on to the Reef and Duff Islands in the north. These latter islands constitute areas of perennial shortage. Balancing this one-way flow of currency is a reverse movement of the most valuable commodity of all—women. The Reef Islands send out some of their women in exchange for bride prices paid in feather currency. Santa Cruz Island never sends its women abroad under any circumstances. Formerly, these women came to Santa Cruz both as wives and as concubines. The concubines were clearly distinguished from wives by the fact that they were shared by a group of men in a form of polyandry; they did no gardening or other domestic tasks normally assigned to women; and while they enjoyed a specially favored social position, they could be purveyed as prostitutes, sold outright, or even killed by the will of their owners alone. Bride prices for concubines were much higher than for ordinary wives—ten times higher to be exact. Due to government regulations, wives only are brought to Santa Cruz Island nowadays, but these are the prestigeful marriages, and their bride prices are larger than those of domestic unions.

This one-way movement of women is correlated with an interesting population phenomenon. Santa Cruz Island population statistics reveal an abundance of males as compared with females of marriageable age, while in the Reef Islands the ratio is nearly even. This abundance of men is a phenomenon which has been noted in other Melanesian and New Guinea populations, but it has neither been investigated nor explained.

The Duff Islands in the extreme northeast corner of the group come into the economic picture, not by sending out women, but by being specialists in making large sailing canoes in which cargos and passengers are transported interisland. These canoes are mainly sold to the Polynesian-speaking people of the small atolls of the Western Reef Islands who make their money by voyaging and trading throughout the group. Formerly, they sailed as far as the southern islands of Vanikoro and Utupua, ninety miles south of Santa Cruz Island. These islands depended upon receiving ground shell discs and special lengths of loom-woven fabric of banana fiber, specialties of certain districts of the Reef and Santa Cruz Islands, which were used as currency there. For these they traded feathers used on Santa Cruz Island for the making of feather currency. These shell and fabric currencies of Vanikoro and Utupua have no currency value in the island where they were made, and feather currency has no value in the former islands.

The Santa Cruz Group has a long history of contact with European civilization, beginning with Mendaña's second voyage in 1595. For the most part, however, the early contacts had little effect on the islanders, but were disastrous for the Europeans. Mendaña himself and many of his company died on Santa Cruz Island, Carteret lost some of his men there also when he attempted to land, La Perouse and his entire expedition perished on Vanikoro, and late in the nineteenth century Commodore Goodenough and a dozen Anglican missionaries, including one bishop, met death in several attempts to bring this island group within the confines of the British Empire and Christendom.

From 1900 onward the situation began to change. The few recruits who had gone away to work on plantations, and schoolboys who had gone away to mission schools returned